J. R. Watkins Building
70 West Crump Boulevard
Memphis
Shelby County
Tennessee

HABS No. TN-179

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

J. R. WATKINS BUILDING HABS No. TN-179

Location: 70 West Crump Boulevard, Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee.

Latitude: 35° 07' 30"
Longitude: 90° 03' 20"

Present Owner and Occupant: United Warehouse and Storage Corporation.

Present Use: Warehouse.

Significance: This early twentieth century warehouse is notable as being designed by George Maher, Chicago architect in the Prairie School following. It is the only building in Memphis designed by Maher and one of the few by a "name" architect of the period.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1908.

2. Architect: George W. Maher (1864-1926).

Maher also designed the Watkins administration building in Winona, Minnesota. This building, built in 1911, is now a well-known example of the Chicago School.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The following chain of title covers the period during which the property was improved. References are to the Register of Deeds of Shelby County.

1898 Deed April 7, 1898, recorded April 28, 1898 in Book 261 page 148 (five lots and eight country acres - $3,000.00)
Mary E. Bingham and W. H. Bingham (husband)
to
J. B. Rozier

1905 Deed December 6, 1905, recorded December 28, 1905 in Book 377 page 202 (three lots - $8,000.00)
J. B. Rozier and Susan B. Rozier (wife)
to
J. R. Watkins (of Winona, Minnesota)

1923 Deed April 28, 1923, recorded May 1, 1923 in
Book 875 page 475
J. R. Watkins Company of Winona, Minnesota
to
J. R. Watkins Company of Wilmington, Delaware

1971 Deed November 15, 1971, recorded November 22, 1971 in
Book G5 Instrument 5957
Watkins Products, Incorporated
to
United Warehouse and Terminal Corporation

4. Original plans and construction: The Watkins Products building was designed as a concrete and brick tower containing sixty thousand square feet of floor space. Its most unusual engineering requirement was that it was designed for a floor load of six hundred pounds per square foot, "to accommodate the large vats of chemicals used in manufacturing the many Watkins items."

B. Historical Context: The principal products of the Memphis plant were soap and fly spray. Manufacturing was gradually decreased and was discontinued at the Memphis location in the late 1960s.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Ceneral Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building is a simple, functional industrial structure with a typical Prairie School facade.

2. Condition of fabric: The building is in excellent structural condition and is well maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Overall dimensions of the warehouse are 57' from east to west x 133' from north to south x 72' high to top of south parapet and 88' high to top of the elevator tower. The building is six stories high with a two-story elevator tower on the east side. It is rectangular, and has three bays east/west and seven bays north/south. An adjacent addition, built later, was attached to this building by a one-bay passage.

2. Foundations: Reinforced concrete.

3. Walls: The exterior walls of this building are a deep red brick laid in running bond (no headers). The south front wall has deep vertical recesses for windows up through the fifth story which are contained within brick "pilaster" strips. The center portion of this facade has five of these window bays while the flanking portions have flat surfaces punctured with window openings. The remaining elevations have horizontal bands of windows set almost flush with the exterior wall surface. There is a rough aggregate concrete (circa 1/4" brown gravel exposed) base across the south facade, 4'-4" at the southeast corner and 5'-2" at the southwest corner.

4. Structural system, framing: The building has a reinforced concrete structural system. The interior columns, 27" diameter in basement and 18" diameter on the sixth floor, support a 12" concrete slab. The columns are round and flare out at the top. Walls are 18" thick on the east, and 13" on the west.

5. Porches: There is a truck loading dock at the west side which is 4'-1-1/2" above grade. The concrete dock slopes down to the floor level of the building. To the north of this dock and connected to it is a lower dock of the original height, 2'-8". This height corresponds to the first flooor level. On the north rear is a concrete dock for unloading materials from railroad cars. It is 3'-5" above grade.

6. Chimneys: A single chimney, 5'-6" north/south x 6'-6" east/west x circa 18' high, stands at the northeast corner of the building. It is constructed of commmon-bond brick and has steel angles at the corners with tie rods around the perimeter.

7. Openings:

   a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance doorway is located at the east end of the south front. It measures 4'-9" x 7'7" and has double doors of wood with full glass panels. Another entrance door at the west end of the south front is now bricked up. Both of these doors are at sidewalk level and therefore 3' below the first floor level. On the west side, facing the truck yard is a delivery entrance in the middle of seven bays. It has an overhead steel garage door 9'-0" high x 13'-8" wide. To the north of this door, and in the third bay from the rear, is a doorway. It is 7'-0" wide and 7'x11" high and is topped with a five-light transom and flanked by windows having 2/2 lights. There are four delivery entrances on the north rear. All measure 15'-0" wide x 8'-0" high and have overhead steel garage doors.

b. Windows: The original windows are of steel sash with frosted safety glass. The 20" wide x 45" high lights pivot about a horizontal axis and are composed in groups of eight and ten lights in a single band across the north, east and west facades. The bands are interrupted by the structural columns which are masked behind the exterior walls. There are other combinations of these lights in two, three and five light units. On the first floor there are two levels of lights due to the increased ceiling height. The windows have concrete sills on the exterior. The interior sill height is 4'-11" to the bottom of the splayed surface and 5'-5" to the glass. There are windows midway between floors in the stairway on the east side. Some of the steel sash windows on the west elevation have been replaced with wood double-hung sash.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The flat roof is surrounded by a parapet. On the north, east and west sides the parapet is 4'-6" high and is an extension of the brick wall below. On the south front the parapet is 8'-5" high and is of reinforced concrete above the 4'-6" level. The covering is built-up tar and gravel.

b. Tower: The elevator tower is located on the east side of the building. It measures 30' east/west x 21'-9" north/south x 24'-4" high. It has two three-light windows on each side.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: All plans are identical although later partitions have been inserted on some levels. The basement is further divided so as to provide for mechanical equipment in the four northeastern bays (2' x 2'). The mechanical room floor is 54" below the standard basement floor level. In the four southeastern bays (2' x 2') concrete vaults are provided. The standard floor plans are open except for the large columns dividing the space into structural bays. The bays measure 20'-6" center to center from north to south, except for the southern front bays which are 19'-4". In the east-west direction the end bays measure 17'-9" center to center while the center bay is 20'-0".

Ceiling heights: basement, 9'-7"; first floor, 11'-7"; floors two through six, 9'-7".

There is a vertical circulation in the east wall of the middle north-south bay.

2. Stairways: The stairs are located in the vertical circulation in the east wall of the middle north-south bay. Between the basement

and first floor there are seventeen risers; between the first and second there are twenty risers and beyond that seventeen risers between floors. There are twenty-two risers up to the floor of the elevator tower and then three down to the roof. In the basement there are seven risers to the mechanical room floor. (Riser- 7-1/2"; tread- 11"; ascent is in a single straight run from north to south and the person moves around the elevator shaft to get to the next stairway).

3. Flooring: Reinforced concrete.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are exposed brick painted white. Ceilings are of reinforced concrete.

5. Openings:

   a. Doorways and doors: Interior doors are found at the stairwell. They measure 2'-8" x 6'-10" x 1 3/4" and have seven horizontal panels. The concrete vaults in the southeast corner of the basement have 4'-2" x 6'-2" steel doors.

   b. Windows: (Not recorded).

6. Mechanical equipment:

   a. Heating: Forced-air system.

   b. Lighting: Electricity is supplied.

   c. Plumbing: There are 20th century plumbing fixtures.

   d. Elevator: The cable elevator is located just to the west of the stairway. It measures 6' x 12' x 8'-6" high. Its opening is on the north side of the elevator shaft, and has a cage door on the cab and a large bi-fold door at each level.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building is located on the north side of the Crump Boulevard just east of the Memphis/Arkansas Bridge. To its east is a later, reinforced addition. This addition was once a part of the building. Between the building and the street is only a concrete sidewalk. To the west is a large parking lot; to the north is a pair of RR tracks, with other industrial type buildings beyond.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Property Records. Register of Deeds, Shelby County. (No address given).

2. Secondary and published sources:

Newspaper article:

"Buildings Sold by Watkins - Space is Leased by Firm." Memphis Commercial-Appeal, November 28, 1971.

Peisch, Mark E. The Chicago School of Architecture. New York: Random House, 1964.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This 1972 project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Tennessee Historical Commission and the West Tennessee Historical Society. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed by Robert C. Giebner (University of Arizona), project supervisor, and Richard H. Hulan, project historian (Nashville).

Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, took the photographs of the building in 1974.

The written data was edited in the Spring of 1985 by Susan McCown, HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, for transmittal to the Library of Congress.